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# INSURANCE & FINANCIAL MEETINGS MANAGEMENT

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How The Hartford's  
Karen Alfonso,  
Director, Meetings  
& Events, is doing  
more with less.

## CVB Update

How Destination Marketing  
Organizations Are Helping  
Planners Enhance the  
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## Savings Without Sacrifice

Keep Incentive Travel  
Programs on Track Even When  
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**Meet Me in Miami**

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## INSURANCE & FINANCIAL MEETINGS MANAGEMENT

THE EXECUTIVE SOURCE FOR PLANNING MEETINGS & INCENTIVES  
JULY/AUGUST 2014 Vol. 21 No. 4



On the shores of Lake Michigan, the Blue Harbor Resort & Spa in Sheboygan, Wisconsin, meets the criteria of being both budget- and attendee-friendly.

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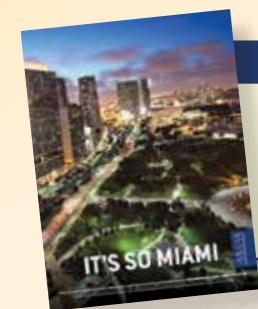
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Experience  
Columbus  
partners  
with meeting  
planners to help  
them experience  
the best of  
downtown  
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Credit: Experience Columbus



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Ballooning up, up and away in Albuquerque and other  
Southwest cities is a favorite activity for attendees.



Credit: Albuquerque CVB

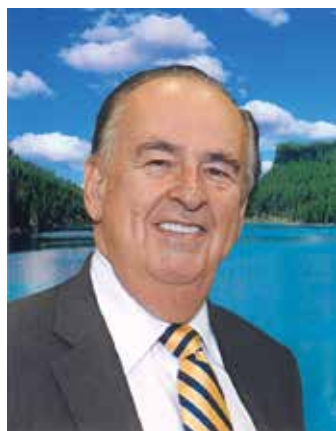
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## Publisher's Message

### Meeting Planners Are Savvy

Meeting planners sure are a savvy lot. After years and years of perfecting the “doing more with less” challenge, planning pros have emerged as “savvy consumers who work harder than ever,” says Karen Alfonso, director of meetings and events for The Hartford. Karen, who is featured on our cover this month, is a seasoned pro who shares her secrets of success on page



14 in “Savings Without Sacrifice — Creative Strategies to Keep Meeting & Incentive Travel Programs On Track Even When Budgets Are Grounded.”

Karen contends, “The days of frivolous meeting spend ended a few years ago. It’s all about the budgets lately. Many budgets have been cut 10 to 20 percent this year, while, at the same time, costs have increased. Our priorities include doing more with less, being smarter with our meeting spend and finding creative ways to save.”

One way to save is by staying fairly close to home and using venues that offer fabulous amenities and activities. Karen’s company is mainly meeting in the U.S. and rotating between the East and West coasts. “Last year we were in Newport Coast, California, and this year we were in Sea Island, Georgia. Next year we will be in Park City, Utah,” she relates. “This year, we hosted a resort-style triathlon featuring hiking, biking and kayaking in one activity, and this was our most popular activity. Our attendees are more active than ever, though golf, of course, is always a priority.”

Like Karen, Rhonda Moritz, marketing events planner for Syracuse, New York-based Cadaret, Grant & Co. Inc., is also largely staying in the U.S. with her incentives. She recently hosted a program in Austin, Texas, “because it’s such an upcoming great place to showcase different things,” she says. Due to changing demographics and other factors, Rhonda says their priority is to give attendees an “experience they won’t have anywhere else or that they won’t have on their own, and Austin was great for that, because a lot of people recognize it for its eclectic personality.”

For planners considering domestic destinations, please turn to page 19 for a special section on Miami, to page 36 for a CVB Update and to page 42 for what’s new in the Southwest.

Harvey Grotsky

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## Starwood Hotels to Expand Portfolio in the Greater Houston Region

HOUSTON, TX — Executives from Starwood Hotels & Resorts Worldwide Inc. and The Howard Hughes Corporation along with its wholly owned subsidiary, The Woodlands Development Company, recently broke ground on The Westin, The Woodlands.

The newly constructed Westin will offer 302 luxurious guest rooms, more than 15,000 sf of meeting and prefunction space, an outdoor pool, WestinWorkout studio, business center and all the brand's signature amenities in a scenic location overlooking The Woodlands Waterway in Waterway Square. The Westin, The Woodlands will feature a 150-seat restaurant, lobby bar and second-level pool deck and bar, with direct access to The Fountains at Waterway Square.

The hotel will be within walking distance to numerous corporate offices, the shops and restaurants in The Waterway Square District, The Woodlands Mall and Market Street, as well as The Cynthia Woods Mitchell Pavilion.

All guest rooms and suites at The Westin, The Woodlands will feature



*Pictured at the groundbreaking (l to r) are Peter Doyle, executive vice president of strategic development for The Howard Hughes Corporation; Tim Welbes, co-president of The Woodlands Development Company; Mitch Gruberg, director of building development for The Woodlands Development Company; David Aupied, senior director, development at Starwood Hotels and Resorts; Alex Sutton, co-president of The Woodlands Development Company; Greg Parsons, general manager and vice president of hospitality for The Woodlands Resort; and Paul Layne, executive vice president of master planned communities for The Howard Hughes Corporation.*

the Westin Heavenly Bed — featuring lush sheets, down cushioning and a patented pillowtop mattress. Guests will revive with the brand's Heavenly Shower, Heavenly Robe and White

Tea Aloe bath amenities, in-room and high-speed Internet access. The hotel also will offer the SuperFood-sRX menu offering nutrient-rich and delicious options. [www.westin.com](http://www.westin.com)

## Loews Royal Pacific Resort Set to Expand its Meeting Space to 140,000 sf

ORLANDO, FL — Universal Orlando Resort will soon embark on the largest meeting space expansion in its history. By fall 2015, Loews Royal Pacific Resort — the largest meeting hotel at Universal Orlando — will expand its meeting and event space from 85,000 sf to more than 140,000 sf.

Inspired by the beauty of the South Pacific, the expanded areas will seamlessly connect to the existing meeting space. The new space will feature a nearly 36,000-sf ballroom, divisible by 12, along with four additional breakout rooms and prefunction space. Once completed, the expansion will offer meeting planners a total of 141,330 sf of meeting space on one level. Group reservations are currently being accepted.

Upon completion of the expansion, Universal Orlando

will feature more than 306,000 sf of customizable meetings and event space destination-wide. Universal Orlando recently opened Universal's Cabana Bay Beach Resort, expanded Universal CityWalk and opened The Wizarding World of Harry Potter — Diagon Alley.

The AAA Four Diamond Award-winning hotel has six restaurants and lounges, a lagoon-style swimming pool, private cabanas, complimentary Wi-Fi, and an exclusive package of theme park benefits including Early Park Admission to The Wizarding World of Harry Potter — Hogsmeade, and The Wizarding World of Harry Potter — Diagon Alley, along with complimentary Universal Express Unlimited ride access, allowing guests to skip the regular lines all day on most rides and attractions in both Universal Orlando theme parks. [www.umeetingsandevents.com](http://www.umeetingsandevents.com)



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## Anaheim, Baltimore and San Antonio Join Forces in a New Three-City Sales Partnership

BALTIMORE, MD — The Anaheim/Orange County Visitor & Convention Bureau, Visit Baltimore and the San Antonio Convention & Visitors Bureau has announced the formation of Synchronicities, a three-city partnership designed to assist meeting professionals in maximizing return on investment.

Anaheim, Baltimore and San Antonio conducted in-depth research with meeting professionals via focus groups and surveys to shape Synchronicities into a partnership that delivers what meeting professionals and attendees want most, an unbeatable combination of value and resources. The partnership assists professionals in achieving their specific business objectives by offering customizable options based on the needs of individual meetings. This personalization is the foundation of Synchronicities, along with a seamless knowledge transfer between the three cities, and a united services and marketing platform.

Working together through Synchronicities provides enhanced opportunities for the destinations to invest in industry education. Partnering with esteemed organizations such as IAEE, PCMA and Association Forum of Chicagoland allows the destinations to better anticipate industry trends and share these findings. [www.synchronicities.us](http://www.synchronicities.us)



(L to r) Jay Burress, president and CEO of the Anaheim Orange County Visitor & Convention Bureau; Casandra Matej, director, San Antonio Convention & Visitors Bureau; and Tom Noonan, president and CEO of Visit Baltimore pose in Nashville after the announcement of their partnership at the 2014 ASAE Annual Meeting & Exposition.

## Cape Cod's Wequassett Resort and Golf Club Renovates Meeting Spaces

HARWICH, MA — Cape Cod's waterfront Wequassett Resort and Golf Club renovated nearly 20,000 sf of meeting and event spaces, which include 10,000 sf of additional meeting space. Meeting spaces include the Cape Villa meeting rooms, which can hold groups of 10 attendees to 30 participants, and the Pavilion Ballroom — suitable for corporate retreats, business meetings, conferences or private dinners for up to 320 guests. Equidistant from Boston, Massachusetts, and Providence, Rhode Island, Wequassett features whitewashed buildings nestled among 27 acres of gardens overlooking Pleasant Bay. The property boasts 120 newly refreshed guest rooms including a Signature Collection of rooms.

The meeting spaces feature the latest in technology, including complimentary high-speed Internet access, multimedia capabilities, blackout drapes, real-time crowdsourcing capabilities, revived interiors, numerous lighting settings and state-of-the-art audio-visual equipment. [www.wequassett.com](http://www.wequassett.com)

## CWT and GBTA Release 2015 Global Travel Price Outlook

AMSTERDAM, THE NETHERLANDS — Carlson Wagonlit Travel (CWT) released a new joint 2015 Global Travel Price Outlook report with the GBTA Foundation, the education and research arm of the Global Business Travel Association (GBTA). The report gives an early indication of what businesses can expect in 2015, helping them plan ahead during the upcoming budgeting period.

The report highlights that demand from emerging markets such as China, India and Brazil and improved economic growth in advanced economies, combined with limited advances in travel supply, will result in an upward pressure on rates, particularly in high-demand travel markets. The study shows that travel managers are prepared for this, however, with those surveyed by GBTA expecting airfares to increase most among all categories due to consolidation in major markets.

"The study reveals that travel managers expect price increases next year across the board on travel categories including airfares, hotel room rates and rental car rates," said Joseph Bates, GBTA Foundation vice president of research. "Risks to the forecast including the escalating Ukrainian crisis; declining European inflation; burgeoning debt in China and oil price shocks could potentially have a negative influence on travel demand and pricing, however, so travel managers are advised to consider contingencies for these risks in their planning."

The 2015 Global Travel Price Outlook is split by category: air; hotel; ground; and meetings and events, making for easy comparison across regions. [www.carlsonwagonlit.com](http://www.carlsonwagonlit.com)

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# Teambuilding

By David Graves



## Luring in Leadership Development

Leadership and team development activities are being infused into corporate meetings and events in lieu of guest speakers as a way to spread a dynamic message and generate attendee engagement. Although they create an opportunity to give attendees a breather from endless speakers, their impact can be much more than a break. In fact, many event organizers are specifically seeking activities that challenge participants' abilities to take calculated risks, identify team roles, and allocate resources efficiently and effectively. By selecting the right activity for your team and following some best practices, you can plan a successful event that caters to your organization's culture and message.

### The Big Picture

Although teambuilding and leadership activities have been included in events for decades, such interactive activities are gaining in popularity as additions to meetings, conferences and events. Groups are looking for new ways to build leadership qualities and allow people to discover their potential through a team environment. These types of activities offer a change of pace to the usual sit-and-listen meeting environment, and the experiential type of learning pushes comfort levels and leaves a lasting impression.

Teambuilding exercises, while fun, also can be quite valuable if they are well conceptualized and strategically organized. So how do you know if an interactive activity like teambuilding will be beneficial? In addition to considering the actual cost of a given activity, it is prudent to consider whether or not the activity's value will be perceptible to participants. Getting the most bang for your buck will hinge upon careful goal-setting while still in the planning stage.

To begin your planning, start with outlining the desired outcome from a big-picture perspective. Too often, teambuilding is simply incorporated into an event for the sake of having an activity. However, identifying a goal is as important a step as selecting the activity itself. Sure, most activities promote employee camaraderie, but can it support other goals and objectives of your organization? Can you hone in on specific group dynamics? Whether participants

realize it or not, activities may be formatted to achieve specific results or deliver a distinctive message. For example, interactive activities are a perfect fit if your messaging revolves around:

- Teamwork and partnerships
- Communication
- Developing new leaders
- Building trust and camaraderie

Case in point is an activity called Ice Odyssey. This leadership development activity, suitable for groups ranging from 30–250 people, can be tailored to deliver key messages and customized specifically to your group. It takes a themed and interactive approach to practicing the business fundamentals found within a workplace as it is a scenario-based exercise. In Ice Odyssey, the group is split up into multiple teams and asked to accomplish one common goal (to catch the most fish). Each team is given directions, resources and guidance as they sort through the information, prioritize and strategize about the best way to navigate themselves through the Ice Odyssey. Along the way, teams are tested in circumstances that challenge their ability to take a calculated risk, identify team roles and allocate resources efficiently and effectively. As teams work to catch the most fish, they address common work themes related to shared objectives, delegation and team collaboration. At the end of the Odyssey, the debriefing session allows everyone to identify behaviors and outcomes that led to their overall level of success.

### Selecting the Right Activity

The desired outcome/goal should be the primary focus when selecting an activity. With the goal clearly identified, it should be treated like every other aspect of that meeting/event in terms of preparation, budget and coordination to ensure a positive experience.

If you are stumped about how to pick the right activity, talk to an expert in the field of leadership and teambuilding. Companies that offer teambuilding, leadership development and interactive activities can guide you to the best option based on several factors:



*Playing Picasso and similar teambuilding activities need appropriate space to be implemented successfully.*

- Desired outcome and learning
- Time frame and space you have for the event
- Attendee demographics including group size and culture

You also should consider having professional facilitators manage and host the activity as they have the expertise and can work with you to integrate your goals, messaging and culture.

Another major consideration when selecting the right activity is the location. Some activities require a lot of space or an area that allows for "getting dirty." For example, Playing Picasso is an activity that starts out by dividing a painting into smaller sections and giving each team a photo of a section to replicate on a blank canvas using paint, brushes and sketching tools. Once the teams have finished, the individual canvases are pieced together to create a reproduction of the full painting. The activity demonstrates that even when working separately, the whole contributes to the bigger picture. Further, by incorporating a specific theme, location or image as your graphic, the activity can be personalized. Securing an appropriate location for your activity will ensure that your activity is executed the way it was intended.

### Dream Big

When goal-setting for your corporate teambuilding activity, it is important to think beyond the traditional objectives of networking, sharing and leadership development. Many have stretched their objectives to also benefit the community. For example, one popular activity involves teams competing to create the best built wheelchair. Small groups work together to answer a series of questions to

earn "bucks" to purchase wheelchair parts. Once all required pieces have been earned and wheelchairs have been assembled, they have to run through the obstacle course to become eligible for inspection. After teams create a custom license plate, final judging takes place in which teams are rated on quality and creativity.

In addition to the obvious benefits of teamwork, this activity offers the opportunity to give back to the community by donating the finished wheelchairs.

### Communication Is King

As in all aspects of planning an event, communication with your interactive activity planner is crucial. In addition to clearly outlining the objectives, it is key to communicate shifts in terms of group dynamics, personalities and size — all of which can drastically change the effectiveness of an activity. However, with proper communication, teambuilding and leadership development can be an effective component of your next event.

**I&FMM**

How do you know if an interactive activity like teambuilding will be beneficial?

**David Graves** is president and CEO of metroConnections. He is responsible for ensuring that the company is operating efficiently, and he directly leads the award-winning Event Services and Production Services divisions. Joining metroConnections in 1988, just four years after the company was established, Graves led the growth in event management and teambuilding and soon became a partner to founder Sam Thompson. Graves is responsible for leading the company expansion in both geographic locations as well as service offerings. MetroConnections has been profitable 17 of the 18 years Graves has been with the company. Prior to joining metroConnections, Graves spent six years with the Marriott Corporation in conference management and sales. Contact Graves at 952-767-1250 or [dgraves@metroconnections.com](mailto:dgraves@metroconnections.com).

# Small Meetings

By Christine Shimasaki



## How CVBs Can Help Planners Deliver Big Results for Small Meetings

Small meetings play a vital role in the success of any destination, and understanding the value they hold will greatly increase a meeting planner's negotiating clout. With a shorter booking window, small meetings may be harder to book, thus reducing opportunities for prime space and preferred dates. But if planners know how to navigate the waters there are deals to be had and partners to help.

A great partner to help with a small meeting is the Convention & Visitors Bureau (CVB). Oftentimes, CVBs are thought of for meetings that require convention center space or multiple hotels, but the same great services and expertise are applied to assisting planners with small, single hotel meetings as well. (See related story on page 36.)

### Three Big Tips

What small meetings have in common is their size; but they can be very different in their type of meeting and/or space and room requirements. Don't get frustrated trying to get space over sold-out dates or trying to find a low rate in a high peak season. Work around these obstacles by following these simple but BIG tips for your SMALL meeting.

#### 1. It Can Be All About Space

*If your meeting needs more space relative to total room nights:*

Most hotels evaluate meeting RFPs by the amount of meeting space required relative to the number of hotel guest rooms. If a meeting requires more space relative to its hotel room requirements, planners might have a harder time finding a fit for their meeting.

If a meeting requires more space relative to hotel room nights, try to be flexible on dates and the day of the week pattern.

Other solutions:

- Alter the agenda so that general session rooms can be reused for meal functions, such as lunch or dinner.
- Look beyond typical meeting space at the hotel. Take advantage of the hotel's surroundings by holding a meeting on a patio, the rooftop or outside.

*If your meeting requirements are not space intensive:*

While smaller meetings do not typically receive complimentary meeting space and/or hotel rooms, planners have options on how to best negotiate and craft their RFP to yield favorable rates. How?

Think about the entire meeting RFP. Look for opportunities to work food and beverage (F&B) into the meeting.

Is this a meeting of CEOs or other attendees who could influence other meeting procurement? In this case, providing a complete attendee profile in the RFP will increase the attractiveness of the meeting to the hotel.

#### 2. It Can Be All About the Timing

*Determine the type of hotel that fits with your meeting's objective.*

Small meetings have options when deciding which hotel can accommodate their requirements. Planners have to decide whether to go with a large hotel, where there are an abundance of amenities, staff and resources, or perhaps choose a smaller boutique hotel, where the meeting may be the only group in the hotel, offering an intimate meeting atmosphere.

Other meeting locations to consider:

- Try looking into museums, commercial buildings or other nontraditional venues.
- Small boutique hotels can hold meetings in their lounge, library, rooftop or pool deck, offering attendees a unique meeting experience.
- Large hotels offer flexibility in space configurations and amenities.

*Determine the ideal booking window for your meeting.*

Typically, small meetings book in the year for the year. For example, a meeting held in October 2014, would book in the year 2014, whereas larger meetings and conventions book years in advance. Because larger meetings book farther in advance, planners of smaller meetings may experience certain challenges in finding dates/rates, but during a very short-term window, if space is available,

*An intimate dinner function setup at the Inverness Hotel and Conference Center, a Destination Hotel, near Denver, CO.*

they have the opportunity to take advantage of need dates and discounts.

Other factors to consider:

- Try looking at the historical occupancy of the destination and talk with your CVB sales professional to learn about the destination's unique demand factors.
- Take advantage of meeting cancellations. Hotels will look to fill the lost revenue, putting the planner in a much stronger negotiating position.

#### 3. It Can Be All About the Savings

*Get creative with your RFP to increase free and/or reduced meeting space options.*

Know the value of your small meeting. Be sure to come armed with data on how much the group spends in total, not just on space, rooms, and food and beverage. When negotiating with hotels, planners with an overall understanding of the value of their meeting will be in a much stronger position.

Other options:

- Talk to your CVB sales professional to determine if there are any promotions or need periods in the destination.
- Look beyond first-tier destinations. There are a lot of amazing regions to consider that have all the ingredients necessary for a positive, memorable experience for attendees.

*Utilize the meeting's F&B to negotiate better room rates and reduced meeting room rental.*

By utilizing food and beverage onsite, the meeting has an increased opportunity to negotiate better rates.

Options include:

- Secure the hotel's all-day food and beverage package. Catering all breakfasts, breaks, lunches and dinners within the hotel will give planners more power to negotiate and the ability to avoid meeting room rental.
- If planners do not have a lot of F&B built into the program, encourage attendees to have their meals at onsite versus offsite restaurants.

#### Where Small Meetings Receive Big Attention

Every meeting, no matter the size, requires a lot of time and effort on the part of the planner. Whether it's all about the space, timing or savings, following these tips will help reduce your frustration and help to get the best deal for your small meeting. Best of all, you don't have to go at it alone. There are people to help you!

The Convention & Visitors Bureau is the best first resource for meeting planners of any size meeting, not just large citywide conventions or multiple hotel meetings. The

If planners know how to navigate the waters there are deals to be had and partners to help.

CVB sales professional provides guidance, insider knowledge and destination demand information to planners.

To find an expert in the destination(s) you are considering, your first stop should be [www.empowermint.com](http://www.empowermint.com). Empowermint.com enables planners to research destination profiles, complete with information on conference hotels, convention facilities, CVB services, a destination map and contact information of destination experts, all for free. To reach out to CVB experts at top meeting destinations, visit [empowerMINT.com](http://empowerMINT.com).

**I&FMM**

**Christine Shimasaki** CDME, CMP, is the managing director of [empowerMINT.com](http://empowerMINT.com) and the Event Impact Calculator for Destination Marketing Association International. She previously served as executive vice president and chief strategy officer for the San Diego Convention & Visitors Bureau, as well as a distinguished career in sales with Marriott.



# Savings Without Sacrifice

By Gabi Logan



All-inclusive resorts that offer unlimited activities like Sandals Emerald Bay in Exuma are great options for tight budgets.

## Creative Strategies to Keep Meeting & Incentive Travel Programs On Track Even When Budgets Are Grounded

Across both the meeting industry and, more broadly, the business travel industry, the economy's return from the recession is having an unwelcome consequence: skyrocketing flight and hotel costs that are overrunning travel budgets.

After shortening meetings, changing up activities and reevaluating who travels and how often, this year planners are turning to meeting destinations above all else as the new place to create savings in their budgets. By curating up-and-coming incentive destinations, working more closely with airline schedules and keeping internal meetings closer to home whenever possible, financial and insurance meeting planners are finding new ways to stretch their dollars

while continuing to create meetings that delight attendees.

"The days of frivolous meeting spend ended a few years ago," says Karen Alfonso, director of meetings and events for Hartford, Connecticut-based The Hartford. "It's all about the budgets lately. Many budgets have been cut 10 to 20 percent this year, while, at the same time, costs have increased. Our priorities include doing more with less, being smarter with our meeting spend and finding creative ways to save."

### The Hunt for Hot Incentives

In finance and insurance firms, it's hard to do "the same old" for incentives. Often a key differentiating factor between companies, high-quality

incentives are a key motivational tool for employees who directly drive the company bottom line.

While many planners are finding themselves restricted to locations in the U.S. or greater North America, changing the focus of the trip from pure relaxation to active rejuvenation has opened up new possibilities for destinations that will both surprise the veterans who have already visited every Florida beach with you and motivate younger employees looking for the next thrill rush.

"Currently, we are only hosting domestic incentives," explains Alfonso. "We tend to rotate East and West. Last year we were in Newport Coast, California, and this year we were in Sea Island, Georgia. Next year we will

be in Park City, Utah. We're making sure that there are plenty of outdoor activities in our venues, because we are seeing that attendees are very active and enjoy much more sports-related recreation. This year, we hosted a resort-style triathlon featuring hiking, biking and kayaking in one activity, and this was our most popular activity. Our attendees are more active than ever, though golf, of course, is always a priority."

Rhonda Moritz, marketing events planner for Syracuse, New York-based Cadaret, Grant & Co. Inc., is also largely staying in the U.S. with her incentives, but finding that up-and-coming domestic destinations offer a superior price-quality ratio that's both budget- and attendee-friendly, while offering the active recreation opportunities that increasingly appeal to attendees. "We just went to Austin, Texas, because it's such an upcoming great place to showcase different things," she says. "We wanted to try to venture a little bit west of the Mississippi, but not overboard, so we decided to try Texas. We've investigated everything from Houston to San Antonio to Dallas to Austin, and when the Hyatt Regency at Lost Pines Austin opened a few years ago, we jumped on that, because it was a brand new property and a great name.

"The resort is 20 to 25 minutes out of town. It's not a downtown resort, but the airport is right in the middle. It's right along the Colorado River, which was a great experience in terms of someplace different, more rugged, but brand new with a great brand name. It had all of those advantages right from the start. We did normal things like horseback riding and trap shooting, but we also do high impact for folks that love extreme adventure. We did some rock-climbing, river-rafting and kayaking, and for medium impact, a lot of programming in downtown Austin. We also had some tours for low-impact folks, because when they get to a destination they want to explore, but some just want to sit by the beach or the

pool, and that's fine. They won it. It's their incentive.

"A lot of companies including ours are noticing changing demographics," Moritz continues. "But even attendees who are older and have been on 30 incentives haven't experienced that type of resort because they're used to Florida and East Coast properties. We want to give them the experience they won't have anywhere else or that they won't have on their own, and Austin was great for that, because a lot of people recognize it for its eclectic personality."

If you have the freedom to go a little farther afield but not a lot of space in your budget, investing time to investigate the feasibility of developing destinations can still give you an edge on providing an experience attendees wouldn't have thought to do on their own.

"Our incentives really range, from about 20 people to 2,000, so the destination depends a bit on the size of the



The boardroom at Montage Deer Valley, a luxury resort in Park City, Utah, an ideal area for outdoor recreation.

group," explains an insurance company meeting planner who prefers to remain anonymous. "For our smaller groups, we've recently done Panama, and we have a summer one coming up in Calgary, Canada. Usually someone higher from inside the company has been there or heard about it and thought it was an enticing destination. The initial recommendation comes from someone higher in the company, and then I need to check it out. For

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*Karen Alfonso of The Hartford says that domestic incentives that rotate from coast to coast are popular with her group, which enjoyed views like this one of Newport harbor last year.*

the ones that are outside the U.S., I predominantly use a recommendation from a DMC and then do my own research from there.

“With Panama, we chose it because of the tie with the Panama Canal, but the destination itself is a little undeveloped,” says the planner. “They don’t have everything that Jamaica or Mexico could offer in terms of availability and selection, but they’re really accommodating and there are a lot of interesting activities available like going through the jungle or taking a boat cruise through the canal. Attendees might not think about it on their own. Perception is a hump that you have to get over. When you do the legwork on your own, you see that while it’s not a hot spot as a destination, you can actually stay outside the city at the beach at an all-inclusive. All-inclusive is important for us, because it helps control the budget.”

As one of the leaders in the all-inclusive segment, Sandals Resorts’ Luxury Meetings & Incentives Collection offers groups a comprehensive, all-inclusive program called Luxury Included. The collection is comprised of 15 resort locations in Jamaica, St. Lucia, The Bahamas, Antigua, Granada, Barbados and Turks & Caicos. Sandals’ Discovery Dining program allows attendees to choose from up to 15 gourmet restaurants at each property, and wines from Napa

and premium brands of liquor are also included. Another budget-friendly advantage of meeting at Sandals Resorts is that most activities are also included, such as unlimited golf (excluding Sandals Emerald Bay), waterskiing, wakeboarding and scuba diving. In fact, Sandals claims to offer “more quality inclusions than any other resort on the planet.” Sandals even offers a convenient “Event Cost Estimate” calculator on its website that enables planners to get a ballpark estimate for hosting their event at any of the Sandals properties as they begin the planning process.

### The Airline First Approach

As flights take over a larger chunk

of budgets, particularly in the case of incentives, planners are beginning to look at their destinations with a more proactive approach to airlift. “Flight prices are going back up; it seems like we have to get over that mindset that everything is in the \$200 range,” says the planner. “In our case, we’re not a hub of any sort, so you’re going to have to connect somewhere which makes things pricier. While this is a challenge personally, I can imagine that if you’re coming out of Newark or Chicago or Minneapolis, you’re spoiled for choice right now.”

“It’s beginning to change how we chose our incentive destinations,” the planner explains. “The last thing you want is to have a 10-hour flight, whether it’s for fun or business. We usually have one or two people from each state, and though we obviously don’t operate in every state, it still gives us 20 states to work with. It’s pushing us toward less remote destinations. We’ll choose a standard hub rather than go to a smaller city that doesn’t have the exact flight times we need. With the airlines (merging), this is a big issue. It seems like there’s less and less flight availability. You can only leave and return a few times a day.”

“You have to consider travel,” Moritz agrees. “You have smaller cities that have stopovers, and the flights are not as cooperative



*When golf is on the agenda, the Plantation course at Sea Island Resort, Georgia, is an attractive option for many incentive travel programs.*

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*The Rattle Inn's rooftop deck can accommodate 240 attendees and provides views of Austin — a value destination that offers improved airlift and great music.*

as they would be from Newark or Philadelphia, where in most cases you can do direct flights because those cities and Atlanta are the connector cities for major airlines. For our incentive, we only have them Thursday to Sunday, and we want to maximize their time, so we don't want to go too far where it's an eight-hour travel day there and home.

"That's why you have to do research early," she explains. "I'm looking at 2016. I can't get the flights yet, but I can look at the schedules for April 2015 and see there are only three flights per day and they leave at 5:45 a.m. and get there at 3 o'clock in the afternoon and go through Chattanooga, Tennessee. When we put together a presentation for company executives, we can say, 'We like the property. It's got a great deal, but

per stateroom to spend on board. Planners are given membership to the Captain's Club loyalty program.

There is one silver lining to the high prices coming out of the main domestic airlines now that they've consolidated — Northwest Airlines with Delta, Continental with United, and now US Airways with American Airlines. Reliable smaller airlines with networks developed enough to include both business and leisure destinations are offering planners good options both in terms of price and schedule. "We were in Austin last year, and it's been working out well because those smaller cities are getting those smaller airlines that are friendlier for going to the destinations we go to now," says Moritz. "Eleven years ago when

ules are making many destinations less feasible for incentives, many planners are turning to cruises as a way to take attendees to several diverse destinations and types of activities in one trip with just one flight to a hub airport with a cruise port, such as Miami or New York. And cruise lines are adapting to accommodate. For example, Celebrity Cruises offers attendees free gratuities, free beverage packages or up to \$300

## Small Meetings Stay Close to Home

While planners naturally have to find attractive destinations for incentives, small internal meetings are less about the destination's attractions and more about its convenience for attendees. Increasingly, rather than choose a central place to gather employees from around the country, planners are keeping meetings close to headquarters or regional offices as much as possible and organizing more meetings in more locations to keep travel time and cost to a minimum.

"Meetings of fewer than 100 attendees are being especially scrutinized," says Alfonso. "The first priority is to try to host the meeting in one of our offices rather than hold it offsite. Last year, we were already condensing meetings and packing more in during the duration of the event, and we are not really seeing any other changes in the format compared to last year, though we are also trying to find efficiencies by bundling meetings together in order to leverage our spend by sharing AV, production and guest-speaker costs, and combining meals. Needless to say, meeting planners are working harder than ever to find cost efficiencies."

"We do a lot of things locally," the anonymous planner agrees. "The really small ones we try to keep in the area, close by, both because we have lower costs in our area and because it's close to where a lot of corporate people would come to work, and the people coming in are manager level or below, so it's easier for them to drive in. But we have noticed we are adding more meetings, which is a good thing."

Moritz is in the process of a test year to evaluate a new way of completely restructuring the locations of her small meetings. "For our small meetings, people do travel. We used to have them in two locations: the home office in Syracuse and the smaller regional office in New Jersey where I'm based,"

*Continued on page 35*

***"Many budgets have been cut. ...Our priorities include doing more with less, being smarter with our meeting spend and finding creative ways to save."***

**Karen Alfonso, Director of Meetings and Events  
The Hartford, Hartford, CT**



here are the cons: this price, this distance from the airport.' If we know the transfer is going to be two hours, it's not worth our time, even if it's a great opportunity to get guests places they haven't been."

Because flight prices and sched-

I started with the firm, these airlines weren't there or weren't going where we need to go. You were at the mercy of Continental or Delta in terms of schedule, number of flights and layovers, the things we look carefully at."

An aerial night photograph of Miami, Florida. The image captures the city's skyline with numerous illuminated skyscrapers, including the Freedom Tower. In the foreground, a large, lush green park with winding paths and palm trees is visible. A multi-lane highway with light trails from traffic runs alongside the park. The sky is a deep blue with some clouds.

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Over the last decade, Miami — a time-honored, century-old tropical hideaway for tourists and celebrities — has evolved into one of the most successful and spectacular meeting and convention destinations in the world.

By John Buchanan

The "Miami" brand is built on a multifaceted foundation, from its rich architectural history to its ever-expanding multicultural influences from food to fashion and music. Today, the city's sprawling metropolitan area — which includes distinctive enclaves such as the downtown arts district, Brickell financial district, Coconut Grove, Coral Gables and Miami Beach — combines ultra-modern urban chic with a laidback, old-school resort charm. Despite the striking modernity of the city's hotel product, meeting venues and other infrastructure, it's still the fabulous beaches and subtropical climate, framed by an energetic Latin vibe, that warm planners to meetings Miami-style.

Much of its success, in terms of resurgent awareness and curiosity, grew out of the South Beach phenomenon that erupted in the late 1990s and drew the likes of the late, legendary fashion designer Gianni Versace, and in his wake models from all over the world, which led to a thriving fashion, movie and TV scene that picked up where "Miami Vice" had left off in terms of style and energy.

Next came the rapid evolution of the Brickell financial district, which is now the international banking capital of Latin America, and the downtown arts and entertainment district that is now home to some of the most acclaimed performing arts facilities in the world.

The Adrienne Arsht Center for the Performing Arts, designed by global superstar architect Cesar Peli, hosts a world-class season of theatre, symphony concerts and performances by Miami City Ballet, headed by iconic former dancer Edward Villella.

The New World Center, designed by legendary architect Frank Gehry and home base of the world-renowned New World Symphony headed by maestro Michael Tilson Thomas, is located in Miami Beach. The complex features SoundScape Park, where visitors can watch performances or films projected onto a 7,000 sq. ft. wall.

Another Miami landmark — one with a much longer history — is Bicentennial Park, located on a prime 30+ acre parcel of city-owned



The Pérez Art Museum Miami



Patricia and Phillip Frost Museum of Science

Biscayne Bay waterfront, near American Airlines Arena. It includes the 2,600-foot Biscayne Baywalk. Now, however, the location is in the process of completing a major new attraction, Museum Park. Its cultural cornerstones are the new Pérez Art Museum Miami, which made its debut last year, and the Patricia and Phillip Frost Museum of Science, a \$275 million, 250,000 sq. ft. facility that will open next year. Other venues and attractions popular with groups include Miami Seaquarium, Zoo Miami, Jungle Island and NASCAR's Homestead-Miami Motor Speedway.

#### MEETING INFRASTRUCTURE

While Miami boasts cultural sizzle aplenty, it's the city's vast and diverse meeting infrastructure that gets the attention of planners. The Greater Miami area now has nearly 50,000 hotel rooms, from unique and charming boutique hotels famous all over the world to major-brand meeting-and-convention properties. In recent years, billions of dollars have been invested to make Miami competitive with any other destination in the country when it comes to top-quality accommodations and modern amenities.

One thing that further contributes to Miami's appeal is that virtually all of its hotels offer outdoor function spaces that showcase spectacular views of Biscayne Bay, from downtown or the Atlantic Ocean from Miami Beach. And Miami's subtropical climate means warm weather that allows for comfortable outdoor events throughout the year.

The ability to exploit local color includes rooftop pool decks, lushly landscaped tropical patios and gardens, expansive lawns overlooking world-renowned golf courses, and palm-lined courtyards and terraces with breathtaking views.

Meanwhile, Miami offers world-class convention and conference facilities. For decades, the Miami Beach Convention Center has been one of the most popular facilities in the world. Located at the heart of the Art Deco Historic District, the complex is within easy walking distance of all of South Beach's best known restaurants, bars and nightclubs. Opened in 1957, the center quickly earned iconic status when it served as the site where Cassius Clay (later known as Muhammad Ali) defeated

Sonny Liston for his first world heavyweight championship in 1964.

The facility's highest-profile user is the prestigious Art Basel, a critically acclaimed art fair that comes every year. To keep pace with its competition across the country, the Convention Center will begin a \$500 million renovation and expansion project after next year's Art Basel. And the art fair recently announced that it would stay in Miami for another five years, even through the renovation.

Another facility highly popular for smaller conventions and conferences is the Miami Convention & Conference Center, located between downtown and the edge of the Brickell financial district. It's a foundational element of the James L. Knight International Center/Hyatt Regency complex and features a 444-seat auditorium, a 117-seat tiered acoustically balanced lecture hall and 20 meeting rooms.

For serious business conferences and educational or training seminars, another good option is the Biltmore, a National Historic Landmark property built in 1926. The AAA Four Diamond hotel features 273 guest rooms and 70,537 sq. ft. of indoor/outdoor meeting and function space located within the hotel and the adjacent Conference Center of the Americas at the Biltmore. The hotel has 14,000 sq. ft. of indoor space and 24,000 sq. ft. of outdoor space; and the Conference Center of the Americas has 14,797 sq. ft. of indoor space and 17,740 sq. ft. of outdoor event space. Individual facilities include three ballrooms surrounded by expansive terraces, breakout rooms, two state-of-the-art amphitheaters, and executive boardrooms.

#### NEIGHBORHOODS

Although to the uninitiated Miami might appear to be a homogenous megatropolis, it is in fact a patchwork of distinct neighborhoods, each of which can claim its own charm and appropriateness for a particular group.

Over the last decade, downtown Miami — the part of the city located along the famous Biscayne Boulevard corridor — has been



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Adrienne Arsht Center for the Performing Arts

re-engineered into one of the country's top arts-and-entertainment districts as a result of the development of the Adrienne Arsht Center for the Performing Arts, which served as a powerful catalyst for an explosion of art galleries, and an eclectic collection of excellent local restaurants and shops.

At the heart of the neighborhood is the Miami Design District, a neighborhood conceived and developed by local entrepreneur Craig Robins, a pioneer of the early South Beach scene two decades earlier. The easily walkable Design District is dedicated specifically to innovative fashion, design, architecture and dining experiences.

Located south of downtown Miami is Coconut Grove, established as a famous brand decades before developers started resuscitating the Miami Beach neighborhood that would become known worldwide as South Beach. Once an arts colony, Coconut Grove is now a shopping and dining mecca known for its quaint boutiques, art galleries, restaurants and cafes. It's also home to the landmark Vizcaya Museum & Gardens on Biscayne Bay. Built in 1916, Vizcaya — one of Miami's most celebrated attractions — is an Italian Renaissance-style mansion that can host indoor functions or deliver an unforgettable experience in its famous outdoor gardens.

Another one-of-a-kind venue in Coconut Grove is the Cruz Building, a glamorous three-story venue highlighted by coral stone outside terraces. Its stunning interiors are brimming with extraordinary features and amenities that include soaring ceilings, monumental stained-glass windows, European antiques and sculptures, massive hand-carved mahogany bars, a dramatic brass and marble staircase, wrought ironwork and sculptures, and more — all lit by interior gas flame lanterns and museum-quality antique chandeliers.

Southwest of downtown Miami is Coral Gables, the area's oldest and most iconic community, famous for its lavish Mediterranean Revival architecture and home to the University of Miami. Developed during the 1920s during the Florida land boom that led to the creation of the entire metropolitan area, Coral Gables was one of the country's first planned communities and is still highly regarded for its strict zoning regulations. In fact, Coral Gables was designed to be only four blocks wide and just over two miles long, with Ponce de Leon Boulevard bisecting it. Its developers sold the fact that every business in town was within easy walking distance, a trait that makes Coral Gables even more popular in the 21st

century. And like Miami's other neighborhoods, Coral Gables offers a range of restaurants and shops. One of its most distinctive and popular offsite meeting venues is Fairchild Tropical Botanic Garden, which features the only indoor rainforest in the U.S. Another coveted venue in Coral Gables is the Venetian Pool: a spring-fed lagoon carved out of coral rock, this historic landmark and swimming pool features cave-like grottos, stone bridges and waterfalls.

Despite the longstanding appeal of places such as Coconut Grove or Coral Gables, there's no doubt that in recent years Miami has been best known for the South Beach district of Miami Beach. Just 21 blocks long and a few blocks wide — from the Atlantic Ocean to Biscayne Bay — South Beach is home to one of the world's most acclaimed collections of architectural gems in its Art Deco District, a number of them designed by fabled architect Morris Lapidus.

Along Collins Avenue, Lincoln Road and Ocean Drive, its three main streets, South Beach now features the most famous restaurants, bars, retail shops and nightclubs in all of Miami. As a result, celebrities from movie stars to rock stars to supermodels frequent the destination, which constantly reinforces its reputation as one of the hippest places on earth. So, while South Beach is popular with small groups with a taste for adventure, it is more popular for incentive programs.

#### GETTING THERE

No destination has invested more money in recent years on state-of-the-art transportation infrastructure than Miami. Miami International Airport, which delivers formidable airlift from across the U.S. and around the world, offers new and renovated terminals and a recently installed high-speed train that whisks arriving passengers from plane to baggage claim and then on to a new Intermodal Center that connects attendees with private and public transportation, car rentals, limousine services and taxis in one convenient location. A new Metrorail service transports arriving passengers to downtown Miami. ■



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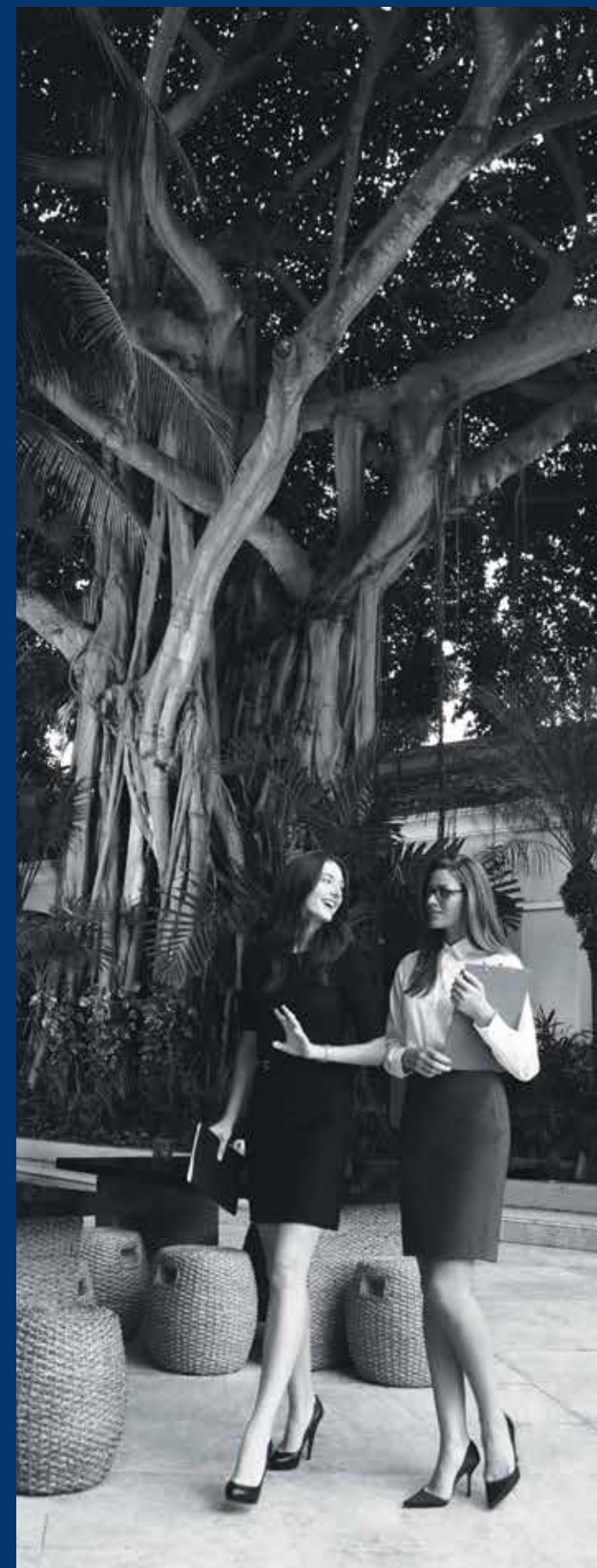
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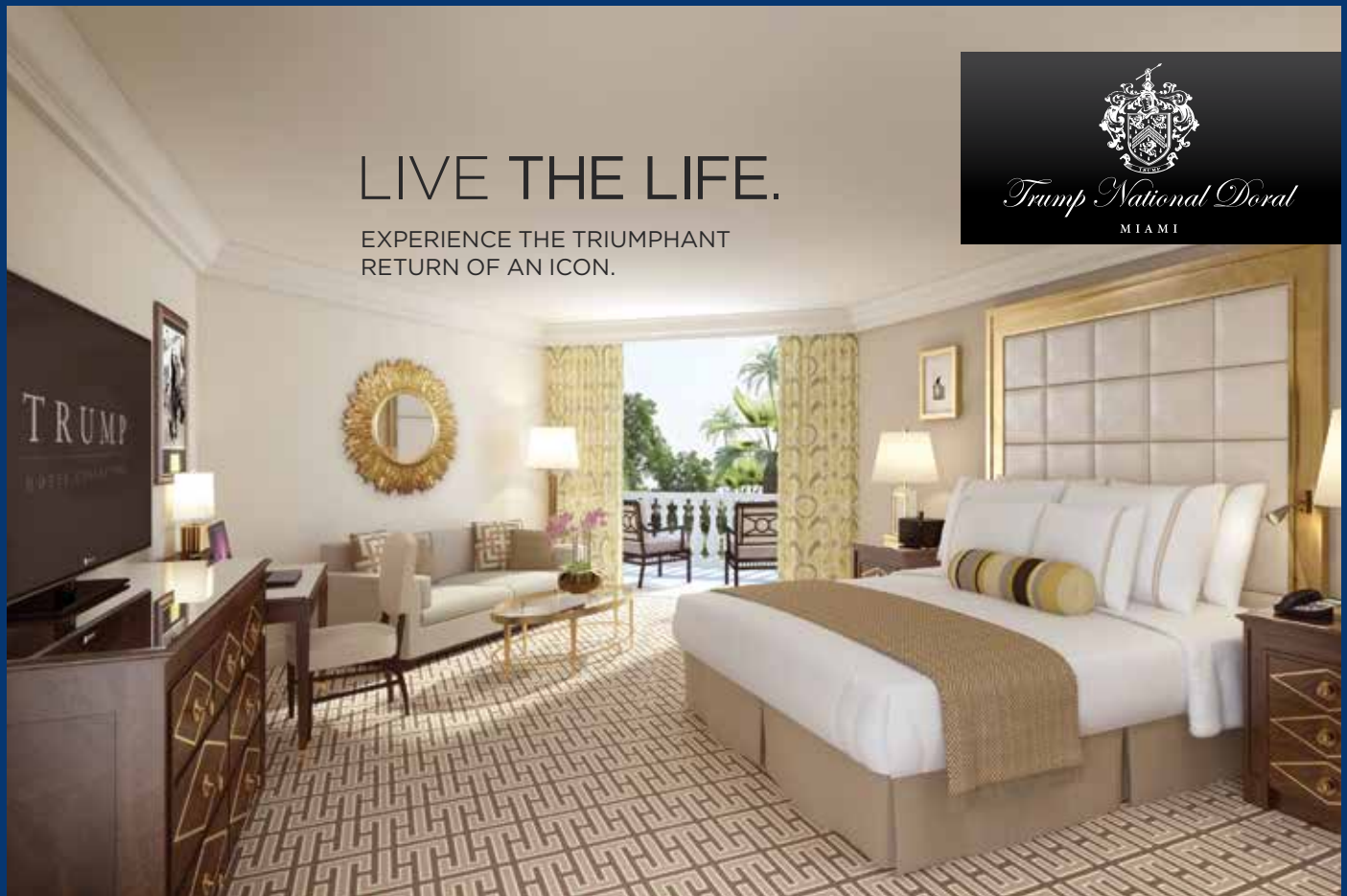
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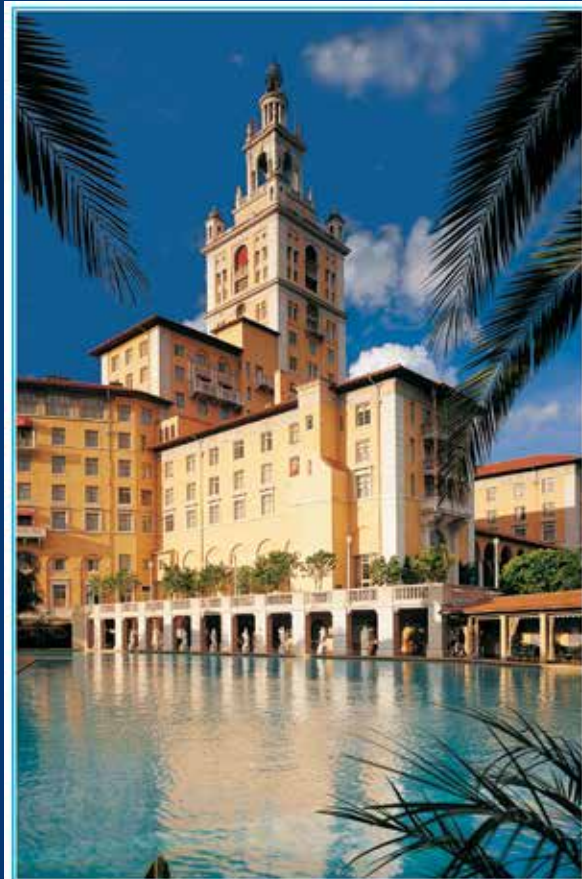
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F O N T A I N E B L E A U



*Continued from page 18*

she says. “We’d invite financial advisors from the surrounding area codes. For Syracuse, we’d do New York excluding Long Island and Westchester, and also offer meeting details to northern Pennsylvania. And for New Jersey, we had a wider range: New Jersey, lower New York state, eastern Pennsylvania and even sometimes Delaware and Maryland. We’d centralize the event in the north central part of the state.

“This year, we found a new way to tailor to some of the advisors that were further away than the immediate area,” Moritz continues. “We used to invite folks from Buffalo, Rochester and Albany, and it’s a hard drive to get to Syracuse during the day and take all that time out of the office, so we decided to split it and get a better concentration. We now have one in Rochester that could pull from Buffalo, which would be 3½ hours to Syracuse, but we could also invite them to Syracuse if they couldn’t make it to Rochester. We

also added one in Long Island to draw New York City and Long Island, and one in Philadelphia which would add central and southern New Jersey.

“It’s a test year,” Moritz explains. “We’re trying to figure out how to make

***“We want to give them the experience they won’t have anywhere else or that they won’t have on their own, and Austin was great for that.”***

**Rhonda Moritz, Marketing Events Planner**  
Cadaret, Grant & Co. Inc., Mt. Arlington, NJ

those programs as productive as possible for advisors. We can’t hit everyone with two big programs, so what may have drawn 40–60 people before, may only draw 20–30 this time, but it might be people who couldn’t make the other meetings before. As a result, I’d say our budget had probably increased slightly, but we’ve tried very hard to be creative with locations and venues. For the meetings that we have, the objective is not to be a destination. With financial advisors, their time is precious, and we don’t want to take them out for too long, since their objective is to sell and be available to clients. But it is important that we do get them out of the office for select meetings.

“Instead of using all hotels, we’re starting to use additional conference centers,” Moritz says. “With Philadelphia, I knew we wouldn’t be in the city center, so we used the university conference center at Villanova. School was out, and I was hoping to get a good deal with them, which we did, and it’s something other than a hotel with four walls. It’s a great room with all natural light.”

Ideal for a small meeting, especially for those who want to stay close to home, Blue Harbor Resort & Spa, is conveniently located two hours north of Chicago in Sheboygan, Wisconsin,

on the shoreline of Lake Michigan. The resort has 182 guest suites that range in size from 500 sf to more than 1,900 sf, as well as 64 two-bedroom and four-bedroom villas. Blue Harbor boasts more than 16,800 sf of meeting and convention space, a 54,000-sf indoor entertainment area, retail shops,

confectionery café and more. The resort has three full-service restaurants, an onsite wine and tapas bar and the award-winning Reflections Spa at Blue Harbor Resort and Spa.

Another great spot for a small meeting is Cape Cod’s 120-room Wequassett Resort and Golf Club, which completed a new waterfront renovation of 10,000 additional sf of flexible space. Meeting spaces range from intimate to large including the Cape Villa meeting rooms, which can hold groups of 10–30 and the Pavilion Ballroom for up to 320 guests.

## **Final Thoughts**

In recent years, insurance and financial meeting planning has been rocked by several key changes. “Meetings have evolved and are now shorter in duration, use a condensed meeting agenda and usually contain a CSR event for a community giving-back aspect,” says Alfonso. “Meals are healthier and attendees are much more active than in previous years.”

Unfortunately for planners, the evolution continues, largely due to constraints imposed by the rebounding travel industry. But the creativity and resourcefulness planners have cultivated is serving them well to face the current challenges and prepare for what is coming down the line next. “Meeting planners are savvy consumers and are working harder than ever,” she says.

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*Ideal for small meetings, Cape Cod’s Wequassett Resort and Golf Club boasts newly renovated spaces, including this exquisite indoor/outdoor tent.*

Credit: ©Scharper Photography



Attendees appreciate lively entertainment districts such as the Arena District in downtown Columbus, Ohio.

# Planners Discover How CVBs Can Enhance the Event Experience

By Derek Reveron

No matter how experienced a planner may be, or how many cities they may have visited, there's always something new and important they can discover from destination professionals. The value of insider information such as calendar conflicts is priceless say planners. And forging a partnership with a trusted friend at a Convention & Visitors Bureau (CVB) or Destination Marketing Organization (DMO) is a smart way to do business. CVB destination experts provide invaluable assistance to meeting planners, saving them considerable time and money. Memorable group meeting experiences are a sure bet when

planners take advantage of the services and benefits afforded by CVBs, such as site and venue selection, RFPs and site inspections, meeting planning and logistics, marketing and promotion, vendor selection, government and CSR connections, and much more.

"Planners seek partnerships to save time, better understand what's going on at the local level, and enhance meetings and exhibits," says Christine Shimasaki, CMP, CDME, managing director of empowerMINT, a Destination Marketing Association International (DMAI) initiative that educates planners on the value of DMOs (*see related story on page 12*). "Planners are asking,

"What kind of local partnerships do I need through DMOs to be more productive if I can't grow my own staff?"

Last year, DMAI formed a industry-wide advisory board of meeting professionals who meet and examine ways to improve DMO services, encourage more planners to use the organizations and overcome industry misperceptions. "Some planners don't know about the breadth of services that DMOs provide," says Shimasaki. "Or there are perceptions that DMOs prefer to send leads to their member hotels. There are misperceptions that DMOs have a membership bias and about what it means to be a membership or non-membership

DMO. At the same time, DMOs have to challenge themselves. What is it that they don't do on a consistent basis?"

## Price and Perks

A CVB destination expert can guide planners on space and price so they have enough information to make the right decision for their group. "Space is one thing, but pricing is becoming more and more important," says a financial industry meeting planner who wishes to remain anonymous. The four-day meeting for 50 financial managers was held in Columbus, Ohio, last year. "You are going to keep your eye on someplace that is economically to your advantage. If someplace is significantly less to rent, that's something you clearly have to consider. While you don't want to go to a place that's tired and dumpy, in this day and age you must look at price and the perks you get as far as food and beverage, Wi-Fi and ancillary things that can add up," notes the planner.

A staff member at Experience Columbus encouraged the planner to consider the city. "She has been a long-time friend," he says. "She made sure we stayed on her radar. I had never been in Columbus before, and she made sure we were looking at the right hotels and gave me direction on what properties would be convenient for attendees. I did my own due diligence as far as venues and room rates, but when it came down to what area of town to consider, she guided me through the process. She and the Columbus CVB were great."

## Second Tier Doesn't Mean Second Best

While this meeting was held at the Hilton Columbus, the planner has previously met at convention centers and touts the advantages of those in second-tier destinations. "It's silly to rule out what some people consider second-tier cities," he says. "Places like Columbus and Indianapolis have convention centers (the Greater Columbus Convention Center and Indiana Convention Center) within walking distance of plenty of

## Construction and Expansion Updates

### West

A California state appeals court derailed the hotel-tax funding plan for the expansion of the **San Diego Convention Center**, according to a news report in *Trade Show Executive*.

San Diego Mayor Kevin Faulconer reaffirmed his support of the project, and the San Diego Convention Center Corp. said it was not giving up on its expansion plan and would be in contact with show organizers and meeting planners to answer any questions about the long-term status of the project. "We are disappointed, but our last expansion faced similar legal hurdles, and we were ultimately successful in our effort," said Carol Wallace, SDCC president & CEO.

The \$500 million expansion of the **Moscone Center** in San Francisco is expected to start by the end of 2014. The project will increase the center's meeting and exhibit space by 42 percent from 625,000 sf to 888,300 sf. Function space in Moscone North would double to 33,600 sf and nearly triple in Moscone South to 267,700 sf. In addition, the project will connect the underground area between Moscone North and Moscone South, creating one large exhibition hall.

Seattle's **Washington State Convention Center** has acquired a two-acre site for a proposed expansion that would add 310,000 sf of exhibit space, 135,000 sf of meeting rooms and up to 60,000 sf of ballroom space. The center's officials have said that, over the past five years, it has turned down more than 300 conventions due to lack of space. Construction is scheduled to start in 2016 and be completed in 2019.

The **Anaheim Convention Center's** expansion plan calls for adding 200,000 sf of flexible, multipurpose space to the existing 815,000 sf of exhibit space. The project replaces current parking spaces, adds new loading docks, a vehicle entrance and a pedestrian bridge connecting to the center. The project is slated to begin late summer of 2014 and is expected to be completed by fall of 2016. Currently the largest on the West Coast, the center offers 130,000 sf of meeting space and the 100,000-sf Grand Plaza outdoor function space.

In California, **Long Beach Arena's** \$10 million renovation project included the new Pacific Ballroom. The special venue is a loft-style ballroom with a flying steel truss grid system sus-



The San Diego Convention Center.



A rendering of the Moscone Center expansion.



A rendering of the Anaheim Convention Center expansion.

activities and hotels. If you are looking for a two- or three-day experience that focuses on training and education, not an incentive, it really doesn't matter a whole lot whether you are in a dynamic downtown."

Take Statehouse Convention Center (SCC), for example. The Little Rock, Arkansas, facility is competing for larger national meetings. Last fall, Cynthia Tomei, CMP, FAHM, meeting planner for Chicago-based Blue Cross Blue Shield Association, hosted a meeting in Little Rock of 325 information management managers, employees and executives from Blue Cross Blue Shield companies nationwide. The event's sessions were held in the SCC, which offers 220,000 sf of meeting and exhibit space, and attendees stayed at the Little Rock Marriott, which is adjacent to the SCC.

The meeting ran smoothly. "We had some functions in the Marriott and some in the convention center, but it was seamless because the Marriott catered both places," says Tomei. "We also used the hotel's AV provider, so the center was almost like an extension of the hotel. It was convenient. You took an escalator from the Marriott lobby down to the center. The service was fabulous. The facility was so clean and well maintained."

Tomei's group met at the SCC because no hotels were large enough to self-contain the meeting. "I don't necessarily look at centers because they've expanded," she says. "We prefer a hotel that is large enough to host everything under one roof. We turn to centers when we have to, and that's for a multitude of reasons. It's comfortable to walk down to a meeting from your hotel space versus having to cross the street or go through a walkway. Hotels tend to be more flexible and negotiable. If the convention center is a union center it increases the rental price."

### New Sales Partnerships Can Maximize ROI

Synchronicities, a new three-city sales partnership has been forged among the Anaheim/Orange County

Visitor & Convention Bureau, Visit Baltimore and the San Antonio Convention & Visitors Bureau. According to a statement, the partnership was "designed to assist meeting professionals in maximizing return on investment."

After significant in-depth research with meeting professionals by way of focus groups and surveys, the three cities developed Synchronicities, which they say offers meeting professionals and at-



**Cynthia Tomei**  
CMP, FAHM  
Meeting Planner  
Blue Cross Blue Shield Association  
Chicago, IL

*"The (Little Rock) CVB was amazing about getting me information about venues, maps and restaurants that were within walking distance for my folks."*

tendees "an unbeatable combination of value and resources."

And, of course, the new tri-city arrangement offers planners the option of meeting in one or all of the three cities.

As a matter of fact, Synchronicities announced that an organization has already selected Anaheim, Baltimore and San Antonio to host their annual conference in 2015, 2017 and 2018, respectively.

### To Build or Not to Build

Destinations without convention centers want to build them. Destinations with convention centers want to expand them. In both cases, destinations want to create more meeting facilities, amenities and contiguous exhibit space to compete for more and larger group business and be in a position to hold concurrent events.

That's why more cities and regions are commissioning studies to deter-

mine whether the cost of building or expanding a convention center is worth the financial return. The studies invariably predict a beneficial economic impact.

For example, a study by Duluth, Georgia-based Strategic Advisory Group projects that building a convention center in Albany, New York, would yield \$25 million in annual spending. Also, a \$200 million expansion of the Wisconsin Center in Milwaukee from 189,000 sf to 250,000 sf would bring \$114 million additional per year to the region, according to a study by HVS Convention, Sports & Entertainment Facilities Consulting in Chicago. The economic impact of expanding the Washington State Convention Center would rise to \$436 million a year from \$272 million a year, according to Visit Seattle.

Another study reports that convention centers are a destination's most significant revenue producer for hotels. Convention center expansion increases hotel revenue per available room (RevPAR) 1.6 percent per year during the five years after construction, according to a study of 15 large cities by Jones Lang LaSalle, a Chicago-based real estate services and investment management firm. Cities without convention center expansions had a 0.4 percent decline in RevPAR over the five years.

### New Book Raises Questions

But a new book questions the accuracy of studies that predict the financial impact of new and expanded convention centers, especially those using public funding. *Convention Center Follies: Politics, Power, and Public Investment in American Cities* (May 2014, University of Pennsylvania Press) by Heywood T. Sanders, a professor of public administration at the University of Texas at San Antonio, is based on an

examination of predictions in 50 cities. Saunders, a formidable urban development expert, asserts that an abundance of convention centers results in intense competition and discounted rates, causing lower financial returns than expected.

Shimasaki says there are several reasons why some new or expanded convention facilities don't meet financial expectations. "It's critical to understand that building a facility is just part of the equation," she says. "There are lots of other reasons why a facility and destination are selected. A lot of times, due to local issues, the facility isn't put in the best place; or the expanded space isn't contiguous; or there isn't a headquarters hotel or hotel package that is connected; or they aren't marketed correctly. You can spot facilities where it's a challenge to attract events, and you can see other cases where they have fixed the problems and are doing well now."

### CVBs Make a Difference

Tomei, like many planners, depended on the local CVB for guidance and assistance. "I had never been to Little Rock before and wasn't familiar with anything in the city," she says. "I had conversations with the (Little Rock Convention and Visitors Bureau) about what I needed help with. The CVB was amazing about getting me information about venues, maps and restaurants that were within walking distance for my folks. They would email a lot of the information. I did a site inspection and pre-planning meeting, and they drove me around."

Another financial industry meeting planner, who is based in Nashville, turned to Visit Music City, the city's CVB, for a five-day meeting last year for 200 risk managers and loss prevention professionals. "The CVB was critical in every aspect of the planning," says the meeting planner. "It was a total turnkey approach. They helped promote events at the previous year's conference, and they helped us put out a bid package to hotels. They sent out promotional booklets and brochures

pending above the 45,000-sf arena floor. It's possible to raise or lower the grid system and drop down electronically operated curtain walls to transform the meeting space to accommodate different types of events.

The Los Angeles City Council recently approved a proposal to connect the **Los Angeles Convention Center's** West Hall and South Hall. The plan would add 75,000 sf of meeting room space. Outdoor space also will be updated.

### South

The **New Orleans Ernest N. Morial Convention Center** plans to spend \$150 million to \$175 million to improve the facility's exterior and support private development of a hotel, condos, retail space and park on a nearby 47-acre riverfront site. The convention center also boasts the new 60,300-sf Great Hall, which includes a 3,420-sf rooftop terrace, a 5,700-sf executive club lounge, a 980-sf indoor balcony and a 4,660-sf junior ballroom. In addition, the center added 25,400 sf of pre-function space.

The **Orange County Convention Center** in Orlando is undergoing a five-year, \$187 million improvement. The project will include new flooring, fixtures and ceilings in the West Concourse. Plans call for replacing Hall WD with a 50,000-sf ballroom, four boardrooms and an outdoor mezzanine. The entire convention center will get wireless infrastructure upgrades, lighting and utility improvements, and new furniture. In addition, a new pedestrian bridge will connect the West Concourse with the Hyatt Regency Hotel. The West Concourse renovation will be completed by 2015. The entire project will be finished by 2017.

**Music City Center**, Nashville's modern state-of-the-art convention center, celebrated its first anniversary earlier this year. The facility offers 1.2 million sf of space, including a 57,400-sf ballroom, more than 350,000 sf of exhibition space and 90,000 sf of meeting space. The center's headquarters hotel, the 800-room Omni Nashville Hotel, provides 80,000 sf of meeting space.

### Midwest

The 41st Republican Party National Convention will be held in Cleveland, Ohio, at the **Quicken Loans Arena** in the summer 2016.

The **Greater Columbus Convention Center** in Columbus, Ohio, plans to



*The Long Beach Convention and Entertainment Center.*



*A rendering of the proposed development of the New Orleans Convention Center Corridor.*



*Orlando's Orange County Convention Center.*

finish a \$125 million makeover within two years. The project will add roughly 36,000 sf to the center's northern exhibit hall, bringing total exhibit space to 375,000 sf. Expansion also will include a redesign of the center's north

end and a renovation of the facility's interior, including new paint and carpet.

The **Minneapolis Convention Center**, the largest convention center in the Upper Midwest, will undergo a \$14.5 million renovation over the next two years. The project includes design improvements to encourage networking among attendees. The renovation also

will include a new mezzanine in the main lobby that will have seats, a lounge and bar. In addition, the facility will include new stairs in the main lobby and visitors center.

### Northeast

The **Boston Convention and Exhibition Center (BCEC)** plans a \$1 billion expansion that will double the size of the facility. The project will add up to 400,000 sf of exhibit space, 125,000 sf of meeting space and a 75,000-sf ballroom. Plans also call for a new headquarters hotel featuring at least 1,000 rooms and 70,000 to 100,000 sf of meeting and function space. The expansion will allow the BCEC to host overlapping, multiple and larger-scale events. Also, it is expected to push Boston into the ranks of the nation's top five convention destinations.

— DR

that were available to our members. They helped us choose venues for different events that would support our theme, which was Music City. We wanted to tell the story of Nashville to our people."

With the assistance of the CVB, the group held functions at the city's most famous venues. "We rented out the Country Music Hall of Fame for a tour, a cocktail reception and dinner in the rotunda," says the planner. "We went to the Wildhorse Saloon, a nightclub. We rented out the top floor and line-danced to a country music band. We also toured the Grand Ole Opry, Ryman Auditorium and RCA Studio B, (a famous recording studio)."

CVBs make a difference south of the border as well. For instance, Cecilia Cruz, executive director for the meetings industry for the Mexico Tourism Board in Washington, DC, encourages planners to see what's new in Mexico for themselves, citing Mexico Tourism's "Live It to Believe It" cam-



*Fiesta Americana Grand Los Cabos Golf & Spa Resort is a good example of why the Mexico Tourism Board invites planners to visit Mexico to see "how beautiful and amazing" it is.*

paign. "This campaign is really about inviting everyone to Mexico," Cruz says. "If you don't go, you can't imagine how beautiful and how amazing it is — and not just our beaches and sun. We also have good venues and good

cities and good infrastructure for all of the MICE segment. I invite the meeting planners to go and visit Mexico and live it to believe it. We will welcome them when they want to go and visit on a FAM trip or come to our road shows so they can know Mexico and do business in Mexico."

Mexico's new government is working hard to address areas of concern to make tourism in the country world class reminds Cruz. "We are increasing security and doing many, many things in the cities, in the venues and in the resorts. I know it is one of the things that meeting planners care about. We also care very much about it. I think it is one of the most important things we're working on."

Adam Lawhorne, CITE, CIS, is CEO of Chicago-based Meeting Incentive Experts, which operates offices in Los Cabos, Cancun and Puerto Vallarta. Lawhorne notes the significant investments being made in new resorts and infrastructure in Mexico as evidence of the progress the country is making. "The people that are investing in the country are not just Mexicans, but also Europeans, Canadians and Americans. I don't think they would invest that kind of money if they thought they were going to have a problem with violence and safety concerns. With this new president that has come in and the infrastructure and things that are changing and really getting better in Mexico, people are seeing a difference when they come down for a site inspection."

In summary, planners shouldn't hesitate to reach out to the destination experts at the CVB, the DMO or the tourism bureau for assistance. Having a trusted partner at the CVB will smooth the way for effective, enjoyable and memorable meetings and events.

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# Southwest Update

## What's New in Arizona, New Mexico and Utah

By Karen Brost

Sometimes, a healthy dose of Southwest sunshine can go a long way toward setting the stage for a successful event. When officials at PayneWest Insurance, headquartered in Missoula, Montana, searched for a destination for their 2014 Network Builder sales event, they found the ideal fit in Scottsdale, Arizona.

### Scottsdale/Phoenix, Arizona

"The majority of our attendees are located in the Northwest, so the primary reason for selecting Scottsdale was the weather," explains Courtney Imhoff, travel and event coordinator

for the company. "In April, most of our attendees are looking to get away from cold weather. Scottsdale offers the sunshine they are very much needing at that time of year. We are also looking for unlimited options for both onsite and offsite activities. Scottsdale and the resort offer that as well."

The property chosen for PayneWest's sales event, which attracted 390 attendees, was the 326-room Scottsdale Resort & Conference Center, which offers nearly 80,000 sf of indoor and outdoor event space. Imhoff says there were several reasons for choosing the resort, but the biggest reason was its

distinctiveness. "From the front circle with its stunning fountain to Sangria's lounge, the resort is full of surprises. The minute you pull up to the resort, it feels as if it's hugging you...clean, quiet and comfortable, and the staff is utterly amazing." She adds, "Did you know they have one handyman whose sole responsibility is touching up paint? This, to me, says they take great pride in their product!"

Imhoff also appreciated the flexibility of the staff. "I am a 'think outside the box' event planner. The staff is knowledgeable with regard to what's been done before, but also allows you



PayneWest Insurance used the Scottsdale Resort & Conference Center (pictured above left) for their sales event where attendees participated in a build-a-bike program for charity and a soapbox derby.

to take full creative control and is willing to go along for the ride. They are forward thinkers that aren't afraid to try something new.

"Lastly, it was the size," she adds. "We look for properties that can accommodate the size of our group but where we don't get lost. With 326 rooms, The Scottsdale Resort allows us

to take over the majority of the property, which, in turn, means we don't have competition for rooms, meeting facilities, service, etc.

"Our entire program is based on networking," she continues, "(so) we are continually looking for creative ways for our attendees to spend time with others in the same line of busi-

ness (personal insurance, benefits or commercial) and form lasting relationships." One of the activities Imhoff organized for her event was a pop-up restaurant event. "Pop-up restaurants are becoming very popular among caterers or chefs who have thought about opening a restaurant but aren't comfortable going all in," she says.



The Westin Kierland Resort & Spa in Scottsdale features 27 holes of golf, 732 guest rooms and more than 50,000 sf of meeting space.

Credit: The Westin Kierland Resort & Spa

“Instead, they create a pop-up restaurant for one evening where they can showcase their skill with little risk and receive feedback to assist them in making a decision on whether they are ready to open a restaurant.”

Imhoff explains how her program worked. “We divided attendees into three ‘restaurants’ based on the line of insurance they sell, provided a private chef who offered customized menus,

adjacent championship golf courses, the Palm and Pine Courses), a build-a-bike program for charity and a soap-box derby. Imhoff worked with a local company, Event Inventors, to plan the latter two. “We changed the build-a-bike by requesting to have the children receive their bikes at our awards banquet, allowing all event attendees to share in the experience and see the impact we had made when the children were receiving their new bikes. This was a heartwarming moment and one that our conference attendees won’t soon forget.

“For the soap box derby, we wanted to make the event more competitive and an event that our more thrill-seeking attendees could enjoy,” she continues, “so we created pit stop challenges. These challenges consisted of everything from trivia to attendees having to eat something like fried mealworms — it was just the added touch the activity needed.”

The Scottsdale Resort and Conference Center, which just recently joined Destination Hotels & Resorts’ growing portfolio, will undergo a series of renovations beginning in 2015, including the development of a lobby bar and restaurant, re-

and we named each ‘restaurant’ after the chef or his style of cuisine.” In addition to the resort’s in-house chef, a chef from a local venue and a local restaurant owner participated.

Over the course of the networking event, attendees also were offered a choice of three activities: a four-person scramble at McCormick Ranch Golf Club (guests of Scottsdale Resort enjoy guaranteed tee times at McCormick Ranch Golf Club’s two

has great golf, restaurants and outdoor activities...plus the fantastic Taliesin West (Frank Lloyd Wright’s school and studio). Scottsdale offers great shopping on Camelback Road and dozens of galleries on Fifth Avenue. Phoenix has the Desert Botanical Garden and Heard Museum (Native American art and history).

“Two hotels I’ve used extensively have been The Westin Kierland and The Ritz-Carlton, Phoenix. The Westin is a huge property with experience handling large incentive groups. It’s also directly adjacent to an outdoor shopping area with a variety of dining options. They have large pools and waterparks that make it a great family incentive destination. I operated a large incentive program (2,000 attendees) from a large insurance company there a few years ago and it was a favorite location for both the attendees and management.”

The Westin Kierland Resort & Spa features 732 guest rooms, including 55 suites, and more than 50,000 sf of meeting space. It also offers a variety of recreational activities including 27 holes of golf, Agave, The Arizona Spa, and the Adventure Water Park, which contains a 110-foot water slide, a 900-foot lazy river and the Kierland FlowRider boardsport simulator.

“For a smaller or more business-oriented group I like The Ritz-Carlton, Phoenix, located on Camelback Road,” Dern adds. “It’s right across the street from the large Biltmore Fashion Park shopping center.” Containing 281 rooms and more than 20,000 sf of indoor and outdoor event space, The Ritz-Carlton, Phoenix offers convenient access to dining and entertainment options. Golfers in the group also can take advantage of “preferred partner rates” The Ritz-Carlton has arranged at the Arizona Biltmore and JW Marriott Camelback Inn golf courses.

“Both The Westin Kierland and The Ritz-Carlton allow attendees to reach shopping and restaurants without needing a car or taxi, which makes VIP dine-arounds easy as well,” Dern notes. “Both hotels are experienced

with handling groups, which makes it easier for the planning team.”

## New & Renovated in Scottsdale

Scottsdale is one of those evolving destinations that always has something new to offer each time a group gathers there. In June, a new venue called Topgolf Riverwalk opened near the 497-room Talking Stick Resort on the Salt River Pima-Maricopa Indian Community (SRP-MIC). The 65,000-sf facility, which offers private event space as well as partial and full buyouts, allows guests to test their golf skills by hitting microchipped balls toward various targets on a 215-yard field. The venue also features a rooftop terrace with fire pits, plenty of sports bar-style food and beverages and 250 HDTVs so no one has to miss a big game.

This summer also will mark the groundbreaking for the OdySea Aquarium which will be the largest aquarium in the Southwest when it opens in the

fall of 2015. Also located on SRP-MIC land, it’s part of the \$170 million OdySea in the Desert complex that already includes Butterfly Wonderland and OdySea Mirror Maze. Future plans also call for the addition of an IMAX theater, a Ripley’s Believe it or Not Museum and a “Taste of the World” culinary experience.

In late September, the former Radisson Fort McDowell Resort located east of Scottsdale will be re-launched as the We-Ko-Pa Resort Conference Center. The 246-room property, which is located near the award-winning We-Ko-Pa Golf Club, will operate as an independent golf resort.

## New & Renovated in Phoenix

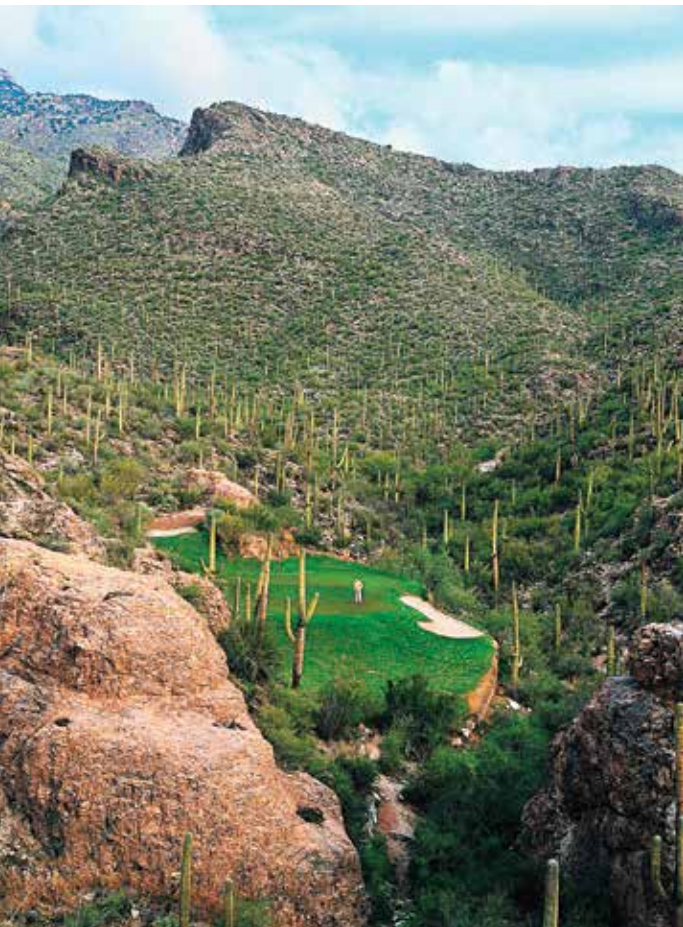
Excitement is building as downtown Phoenix prepares to become the “epicenter” for activities related to Super Bowl XLIX, which will take place on



***“The majority of our attendees are located in the Northwest, so the primary reason for selecting Scottsdale was the weather.”***

**Courtney Imhoff**  
Travel and Event Coordinator  
PayneWest Insurance  
Missoula, MT

February 1, 2015 at the University of Phoenix Stadium in the Phoenix suburb of Glendale. The Phoenix Convention Center will be home to the interactive theme park called the NFL Experience as well as the NFL Media Center, which will serve as the headquarters for the 5,000 members of the media expected to attend. The nearby CityScape shopping and entertainment



Credit: Loews Ventana Canyon Resort

*Loews Ventana Canyon Resort in Tucson features 37,000 sf of flexible meeting space, two Tom Fazio-designed PGA golf courses and the 7,000-sf Lakeside Spa.*

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*The Wigwam, west of downtown Phoenix, recently completed a multimillion-dollar renovation, which added several new outdoor event spaces.*

Credit: The Wigwam

complex will be the site of NFL House, which will serve as hospitality central for Super Bowl VIPs.

The Arizona Biltmore, A Waldorf Astoria Resort, is undergoing a multimillion-dollar renovation of its Paradise, Garden, Valley, Cottage and Terrace Court accommodations. One of the most notable changes will be the new embossed metallic wall coverings that mimic the historic Frank Lloyd Wright design of the “Biltmore Blocks” used to construct the iconic resort.

Travelers who find themselves facing a layover in Terminal 4 at Phoenix Sky Harbor International Airport now can put that time to good use. They can grab a free brochure and follow the PHX Fitness Trail, a two-mile walking circuit that stretches from the terminal’s A concourse to its D concourse. Travelers can complete the circuit without going back out through security while they take in views of the mountains, parks and man-made wonders of Phoenix.

The 563-suite Pointe Hilton Squaw Peak Resort recently unveiled an expanded outdoor event space: The Anasazi Courtyard doubled in size to 8,000 sf, and now accommodates up to 800 guests.

Just 15 miles west of downtown Phoenix, The Wigwam recently completed a \$16 million, multiphase renovation — including new interior décor, a new pool complex, new restaurants and bars featuring al fresco dining

and entertaining areas, and a variety of new social areas. The resort, designated as a “Historic Hotel of America,” features 331 casita-style guest rooms and boasts more than 100,000 sf of flexible indoor and outdoor meetings and event facilities that can accommodate groups of up to 1,000 people. The recent renovation added several new



*The Westin La Paloma Resort & Spa in Tucson recently completed a resort-wide renovation.*

Credit: The Westin La Paloma Resort & Spa

outdoor spaces, including private gardens, an al fresco poolside terrace, and a grand lawn with new lighting and staging areas.

## Tucson, Arizona

When one of an event’s goals is to wow attendees with the saguaro-studded beauty of the Sonoran Desert, one option is the 398-room Loews Ventana Canyon resort in Tucson. The resort also features 37,000 sf of flexible meeting space, two Tom Fazio-designed PGA golf courses and the 7,000-sf Lakeside Spa.

Loews was the site of the 2014 Safety Works Plus Expo presented by CopperPoint Mutual Insurance Company in May. The event drew approximately 200 attendees and 15 exhibitors. “The number of attendees was about the same as usual for our southern Arizona event, but the number of exhibitors was down a bit,” explains Bruce Trethewy, communications manager for CopperPoint. “I believe it is because the venue is not really centrally located within the city. However, the venue was very nice and had great views.”

He described the factors that made Loews Ventana Canyon a good choice for the event. “We were able to keep everything contained in a small area,” he notes. “The classroom sessions and exhibitors were close together, so exhibitors were pleased. All classrooms were down one hallway next to the larger general session (ballroom) area. The year prior, we had to use two floors, which was inconvenient. Our space at the Ventana was all on one floor, and it was large enough to accommodate all our needs.”

He explained another advantage of holding the event at Loews. “The staff was very accommodating and always close by, so we didn’t have to go looking for anyone when we needed something.”

The AAA Four Diamond Lodge at Ventana Canyon in Tucson recently announced a multimillion-dollar renovation. The first phase, set for completion in January of 2015, will update all one-bedroom suites while the second and third phases will debut revamped dining areas, a pool and Jacuzzi spa, and an expanded Golf House and Golf Academy. The all-suite property has completed a renovation to the common areas, including the lobby, fitness center, patios and a portion of the grounds.

Last year, The Westin La Paloma Resort & Spa in Tucson completed a \$35 million resort-wide renovation that encompassed all of its 487 guest



Credit: Enchantment Resort

*Enchantment Resort in Sedona is surrounded by stunning red rock formations.*

rooms, which include 25 suites. The resort’s 60,000 sf of conference space was redone as were its fitness center, tennis courts, and the greens and bunkers of its 27 holes of Jack Nicklaus Signature golf. In addition, the resort’s lobby, five pools and its 177-foot “SlideWinder” waterslide also received updates.

The Metropolitan Tucson Convention & Visitors Bureau is continuing its “Tucson on Us” promotion whereby qualifying groups can receive a credit for new meetings booked in 2014–15 and actualizing in 2014–16. For example, a meeting with 101 to 200 peak room nights could be eligible for a \$2,500 credit, and multiyear meetings (for two or three consecutive years) can receive the credit for each year. More details are available at [www.tucsononus.com](http://www.tucsononus.com).

## Sedona, Arizona

When it comes to delivering iconic Southwestern views, it’s hard to beat the setting of Enchantment Resort in Sedona, 110 miles north of Phoenix. Nestled at the base of a box canyon, Enchantment is surrounded by stunning red rock formations. The 218-room luxury resort offers a variety of accommodations, including casitas, junior suites, haciendas and casas as well as The Meeting Village, which offers more than 13,000 sf of event space. The resort also is home to Mii Amo Spa, which was recently recognized as one of the top destination spas

in the world in *Travel + Leisure’s* World’s Best Awards.

Enchantment Resort offers meeting groups exclusive access to Seven Canyons golf club nearby. The par-70, 6,746-yard championship course was designed by Tom Weiskopf amid a stunning landscape bordering Coconino National Forest and red rock canyons. The resort’s golf pro can assist in arranging a golf tournament or other teambuilding activity at the course. Seven Canyons also has a new venue, the Range House, which offers indoor and outdoor spaces for banquets.

## Albuquerque, New Mexico

Albuquerque has invested more than \$300 million in recent development projects and those planned for the future. One of these projects is

well underway at the Albuquerque Convention Center, which is currently wrapping up phase two of a \$22 million facelift. The newest phase includes a 6,600-sf addition, which includes a new entrance vestibule, retail space and an outdoor deck. The interior of the convention center is receiving new floor, wall and ceiling finishes; new LED lighting; and the installation of a gas fireplace in the atrium.

Heritage Hotels & Resorts is building a new 118-room hotel in the heart of Old Town Albuquerque scheduled for completion in spring 2016. The property will be built adjacent to Hotel Albuquerque and will share Hotel Albuquerque’s pool, ballrooms and chapel. Guest room terraces will overlook the Sandia Mountains and downtown skyline, or gardens and pool. The hotel’s design is inspired by Native American culture.

The Albuquerque Convention & Visitors Bureau is offering meeting planners a new incentive to help “spice up” their meetings. Named “Your Recipe for Success,” the incentive program features a culinary theme and offers four different packages, or “recipes,” based on the group’s number of peak room nights. For example, the Medium or “Mediano” package is based on 201–399 peak room nights and includes one comp per 35 rooms booked, an airport welcome banner and complimentary



Credit: Heritage Hotels & Resorts

*Rendering of a new 118-room hotel to be built adjacent to Hotel Albuquerque in the heart of Old Town Albuquerque, scheduled for completion in spring 2016.*

transportation for a group dine-around. Complete details are available at [www.itsatrip.org/RecipeIncentive](http://www.itsatrip.org/RecipeIncentive).

### Santa Fe, New Mexico

After more than two years of renovations, two historic Santa Fe buildings, Marian Hall, dating back to 1910 and St. Vincent Hospital, which opened in 1953, have been transformed into the Drury Plaza Hotel. The 182-room property debuted in July as the first large, new hotel to open in downtown Santa Fe in 18 years. It will offer a 3,800-sf ballroom and a year-round heated rooftop bar and pool offering view of the Sangre de Cristo Mountains.

### Salt Lake City, Utah

The Grand America Hotel, Salt Lake City's only AAA Five Diamond property, recently announced that it is partnering with The Road Home, a social service agency that operates the state's largest homeless shel-



Winter scene of the Salt Lake City, Utah, skyline showing the Mormon Temple in downtown backed by the snowcapped Wasatch Mountains.

The Utah Legislature recently passed a bill that moved the construction of a new convention hotel in downtown Salt Lake City one step closer to becoming a reality. According to Salt Lake County Mayor Ben McAdams, "With a headquarters hotel, Utah will soon be the Rocky Mountain destination for more large conventions, tens of thousands of new visitors and millions of dollars in new revenue. This privately built hotel will also bring us the overdue meeting space that convention planners need and that will help keep the Salt Palace Convention Center bustling more weeks of the year." Construction plans and a hotel brand have not yet been announced.

### Park City, Utah

Located just 35 minutes from Salt Lake City International Airport, Park City is an upscale, alpine resort area offering a wide choice of activities in every season. In the winter months, the area is famous for its skiing, snowboarding, snowmobiling and other mountain sports, and in the summer, meeting or incentive participants can choose from fly fishing, hiking, horseback riding and other outdoor adventures.

The Park City Convention & Visitors Bureau reports that planners have a choice of more than 30 top-tier lodging and conference facilities and that the area can accommodate

groups of up to 700 with its 125,000 sf of meeting space.

One example of the luxury lodging available in Park City is the Grand Summit Hotel located in the Canyons Resort area. The 350-room hotel offers a variety of accommodations, including hotel rooms, studios, suites and luxury penthouses.

Canyons Resort also offers unique venues for private events. The Red Pine Lodge, located at an elevation of 8,000 feet, is accessed via a scenic gondola ride and can accommodate up to 350 guests indoors or a private event for up to 100 outdoors. For smaller events with 40–80 guests, Lookout Cabin provides a secluded, mountaintop setting that delivers 360-degree views of the Wasatch Mountains.

Park City is also home to Utah Olympic Park, site of the 2002 Winter Olympics. Today, it is used as a venue that features free museums, performances by athletes, adventure courses, ziplines, an alpine slide and the Summer Comet Bobsled ride. The Utah Olympic Park also offers event facilities that include a theater, day lodge, two ski museums, a conference room, and a café and patio.

### Southwest Success

Planners who are looking for a refreshing change of scenery (and weather) for their next event may very well want to follow in the footsteps of their colleagues — those who have met with success by heading southwest to Arizona, New Mexico or Utah. **IFMM**



**Kevin Dern**  
Kevin Dern Travel  
St. Louis, MO

***"Phoenix/Scottsdale is an excellent option for incentive and corporate groups because you can get a resort-like experience and warm weather without having to go too far south or west."***

ter. The hotel will create hygiene kits from unused toiletries from its guest rooms to be given to the organization and leftover food and linens the hotel no longer uses will also be donated. The Grand America, a 24-story luxury property, contains 775 guest rooms, including 396 suites, and 75,000 sf of meeting space.

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**MONTESANO**



**TRABUCCO**



**FASY**



**FERGUSON**



**SCHIEFERDECKER**

Terranea, by Destination Hotels & Resorts, Rancho Palos Verdes, California, has named **Sandra Montesano** as director, national accounts for the Midwest and **Maria Trabucco** as director of national accounts for the Northeast. Montesano was director Midwest and incentive sales for La Quinta Resort & Club. Trabucco was director of national accounts, Northeast, for the Walt Disney World Swan and Dolphin Hotel in Orlando.

**Kevin James Rosa** was named director of sales and marketing for Loews Don CeSar Hotel in St. Pete Beach, Florida. He was director of sales and marketing at Turnberry Isle Miami.

Shelborne Wyndham Grand South Beach, Miami, Florida, has named **Michael Choiniere** as director of sales and marketing. He formerly served as vice president of sales and marketing for The Abaco Beach Resort at Boat Harbour in The Bahamas.

**Meg Fasy**, CMP, was named vice president of sales for Bellagio, Las Vegas, Nevada. She was the vice president of industry relations at PSAV.

La Cantera Hill Country Resort, by Destination Hotels & Resorts, in San Antonio, Texas, has named **Danielle Johnson** as director of group sales. She was a group sales manager for Vail

Cascade Resort & Spa, by Destination Hotels & Resorts, in Vail, Colorado. **Kerri Matthews** was named sales manager. She most recently served as director of Southwest sales at Gaylord Texan Resort & Convention Center in Grapevine, Texas. **Tiffany Ferguson** also was named sales manager. She formerly served as national sales manager at Miramonte Resort and Spa in Indian Wells, California.

**Kavin Schieferdecker** was promoted to director of sales and marketing at the Hilton Anatole in Dallas, Texas. He joined Hilton Worldwide in 2009 as director of sales at the Hilton Anatole. **I&FMM**

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